

Part 2

International Organizations and Education

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Homeschooling in the BRICS Members States: A Comparative Study

Abstract

Homeschooling is an alternative method of teaching where parents take the responsibility of education and teach their children at home. This method of education is increasing worldwide. Various authorities around the world have taken note of this trend and recognized homeschooling as an alternative method of education in their legislation. The paper examines the educational policy and practice of homeschooling in the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) through a literature study, with the aim of comparing the five countries to hit. It also looks at what the BRICS countries can learn from each other regarding homeschooling. Most of the BRICS countries have education law that does not provide for homeschooling. In the countries where homeownership is legal, there are strict requirements that must be met. These requirements place a heavy burden on home school parents. However, it is clear from the investigation that homeschooling is increasing in the BRICS countries legally and illegally. There are also other similarities arising from the study.

Keywords: BRICS countries, education system policy and practice, homeschooling

Introduction

Rademeyer (2015) states the following unequivocally that homeschooling is one of the most controversial educational issues in South Africa and that parents, educationalists and education experts can differ greatly from one another. These differing views are probably partly due to the unfamiliarity of the nature and context of homeschooling, within and outside the educational community, as well as at national and international levels. There is little empirical data available on homeschooling in the BRICS countries, so this paper concentrates on homeschooling in the BRICS countries. In order to contribute to the better dissemination of knowledge and information regarding the practice of homeschooling, this paper focuses specifically on the comparison between education policy and practice of homeschooling in the BRICS countries. A literature study serves as the basis for the comparison between Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

Homeschooling

A variety of homeschooling definitions are available in the literature. Most of this is in line with the fact that the parent takes on the responsibility of teaching the child at home, outside the national school system. Homeschooling is defined by Vieux (2014, p. 556) as schooling that occurs outside of an institutional school setting and where parents are responsible for providing their children. According to Louw (1992, p. 356), at least one of the parents in the family accepts full responsibility for the teaching and learning of their children. This teaching and learning are usually done by the mother without any compensation from the state. Therefore, children who are taught at home do not attend public or private schools at all.

Homeschooling in the BRICS countries

The purpose of this section is to compare the BRICS countries' experiences with regard to the homeschooling. Some of the main points discussed by Kostecka (2008, pp. 451-458), in her study on the legal status of homeschooling in the post-Communist countries of Central Europe, will serve as a framework for this section. Comparisons will be made between the BRICS countries to answer the following questions: What is the official point of view regarding homeschooling in each of the BRICS countries? Who can receive homeschooling and what prerequisites must be met? What are the reasons why parents prefer homeschooling to formal schooling? What is the scope of homeschooling? How is the quality of education that children receive in-home education regulated?

The prerequisites for homeschooling

Of the five BRICS countries, homeschooling was legalized in only two of the countries, namely in South Africa and Russia.

In terms of section 3 of the South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996, every child is obliged to attend school from the first school day of the year in which he/she turns seven to the last day of the school year in which he/she turns fifteen or has passed grade 9, whichever happens first. However, section 51 of the same Act makes it clear that parents who want to teach their children at home must apply to the Head of the Provincial Department of Education to register their children with the department.

If the head of the department is satisfied with the following requirements, he/she must register the child for homeschooling with the Department of Education (section 51 of the South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996):

- If the registration for homeschooling is in the best interests of the child;
- If the education that the child will receive at home meets the minimum requirements of the public-school curriculum;
- The parents will comply with any other conditions set by the Head of the Department of Education.

Children who still receive homeschooling after grade 9 have several options for obtaining a matric certificate. Academic matriculation remains the most popular way among homeschoolers and can be obtained in two ways, among others, South

African Matric and Cambridge Matric (SA Homeschoolers, 2020). In addition to the academic matriculation certificate, homeschoolers can also complete an adult matriculation certificate. In Russia, learners are required to attend school from the age of six, and not older than eight years, until the end of the year, they turn fifteen (Article 19 of the Federal Education Act of Russia no. 3266.1 of 1992). Learners under the age of six to over 15 can be taught at home, provided they follow the federal standards of education (For Family Rights, 2015). Other curricula may be used to supplement the official curriculum (For Family Rights, 2015). In Russia they use the concept self-education which is similar to home-schooling. There are different forms of self-education and each form has its own conditions that must be met, namely (Melnikov, 2010):

- Family Education. These learners are enrolled in a local school but are taught at home by their parents.
- “Externship” is much like family education. The relationship between the school and the family is regulated by an order of the principal.
- Homeschooling is a third form that is also common. In Russia, this term does not mean the same as in other parts of the world. It refers to learners being taught at home by a teacher because of serious illness or physical disabilities. Regardless of the form of homeschooling that parents give to their children, the parents must inform the municipal authority of their choice and their children still must take regular exams in order to obtain a high school diploma (Melnikov, 2010).

In India, there are no clear guidelines or laws regarding homeschooling. Therefore, it can't be clearly determined who may not be taught at home (HSLDA, 2010). In China and Brazil, homeschooling is illegal, and no one should receive homeschooling. If children are taught when at home, it is illegal (Guo-ping, 2014; Prado, 2016).

Homeschooling in BRICS

The number of children being taught at home in the BRICS countries varies from country to country. Despite the growing number of children being taught at home, it is safe to claim that the number of children involved is relatively small to the school-going population. It can be assumed that South Africa has the largest number of children being taught at home. Homeschooling in South Africa is growing phenomenally. The legal fund for home education in South Africa, namely the manager of the Pestalozzi Trust, van Oostrum (2013, p. 11), believes there could be between 30,000 and 90,000 learners receiving homeschooling in South Africa. Homeschooling in Russia is a growing trend (Shamolina, 2016) and it is referred to as “family education” (HSLDA, 2016). The total number of homeschooled children is estimated at a maximum of 75,000, representing about 0.5% of the total of 14.1 million school-aged children in Russia (Shamolina, 2016).

Determining the true numbers of homeschoolers in Brazil, China and India is difficult. As is homeschooling in an uncertain area regarding its legalization, there is growing interest in homeschooling as an alternative way of education (HSLDA, 2010). Homeschooling is not legally mandatory in this country (HSLDA, 2010). The literature indicates that there is a growth in the number of children receiving

homeschooling in the BRICS countries. It is still relatively small to the total school-going population but is growing at a rate that requires authorities not to avoid the potential impact of homeschooling in their country.

Homeschooling challenges

The general public believes that children in homeschooling do not socialize. For the wider community, this can be considered an obstacle. However, children who receive homeschooling are convinced that this is not the case and that they are given more than enough opportunities to socialize (Van Schoor, 1999, pp. 206-207). In the BRICS countries there are many other diverse, yet similar, obstacles that homeschooling families must overcome. For example, the legal uncertainty of homeschooling in Brazil is a cause of the following obstacles that homeschooling families must overcome (De Holanda, 2012):

- Firstly, there is the condemnation and criticism they receive from family, friends, and experts (because it is a strange/illegal phenomenon);
- Secondly, there is a lack of curriculum providers and educational guidelines that meet their unique educational needs;
- Many parents are afraid to expose themselves as homeschooling supporters and to communicate with other parents about it in that context.

Until homeschooling is declared legal or illegal in Brazil, these uncertainties will continue to exist. Although homeschooling is a growing trend in Russia (Shamolina, 2016) and the law supports parents' rights, however, many parents feel that choosing to use family education can be a major administrative obstacle and not user-friendly (Melnikov, 2010). A well-known homeschooling parent, Saju Joseph (2015) from India also mentions some challenges he and other homeschooling parents face. Among these obstacles, he mentions the constant energy it takes to teach children at home – there must be daily planning and new activities devised to keep children productive. Parents should always be willing to listen, play and not become anxious when children understand certain concepts more slowly.

According to Terry (2013), parents who prefer homeschooling in China have major concerns with which they are struggling. In China, the one-child policy ensures that almost all parents have only one child and this child becomes the focus of his parent's and grandparents' ambitions and dreams. The custom in China is that this child's future also determines his entire family's future because he/she must care for them one day. With such a large population as China has, competition is strong and access to colleges and universities is severely restricted. Access to a good university is considered the pinnacle of a successful childhood. With the choice of homeschooling, parents can run the risk of not achieving these dreams and ideals for their child. Children who are homeschooled in China are unable to take the standardized high school exams, which may, among other things, prevent him/her from writing the compulsory entrance exam required to be admitted to a university in China (Terry, 2013). Another obstacle that stems from the one-child policy is the fact that socialization is minimized if homeschooling is preferred because there are no siblings. Socialization usually takes place at schools, which in the case of homeschooling do not materialize (Zhao & Badzis, 2014, p. 19). In the study by Zhao and Badzis (2014, p. 20), homeschooling families also identified the lack of

appropriate homeschooling curricula and poor publicity of homeschooling as an educational option and the legalization of homeschooling as additional barriers.

Although homeschooling in South Africa is legal, there is still confusion and questions from parents who are considering teaching their children at home. Breytenbach (2013) mentions an important obstacle facing parents of homeschooling families in South Africa. Parents fear that they will not be able to meet their children's educational needs and that they will fail. They fear what the public outside of them thinks. There is little public recognition and parents are under pressure not to doubt their affection and the value of homeschooling for their family. According to the brochure of the Pestalozzi Trust, the legal fund for homeschoolers in Southern Africa, another obstacle for homeschooling families is the legal consideration of homeschooling. To register or not to register with the Department of Education?

If the BRICS countries are compared in terms of the barriers to homeschooling, it can be concluded that there is generally a fear among parents about the choice of homeschooling for their children. In many of the BRICS countries, there is a shortage of curriculum providers and in the countries where homeschooling is legal, the administrative burden is very high.

BRICS countries cooperation regarding homeschooling

Through this study, it was possible to identify one BRICS country that serves as a forerunner in terms of family versus home education as a human rights choice of education. The authorities of Russia have a very open attitude towards homeschooling and had already legalized this method of education in 1992. The way in which Russia exercises control over the conduct of children who are taught at home is something that another four BRICS countries can learn. However, Russia's regulation of homeschooling is strict and all children receiving homeschooling are still required to enroll in a school. These schools serve as supervisory bodies to ensure that children who were taught at home, still receive a good standard of education. South Africa already has similar legislation in place, but it is centralized in nature and lacks the management of this legislation at the provincial level. Brazil, India, China and South Africa can learn more about homeschooling in Russia in terms of developing legislation and requirements that need to be met, as well as the regulation of quality education that children receiving homeschooling receive.

Conclusion

Each BRICS country has its own sense of homeschooling. Compared to the international trend regarding homeschooling, only Russia and South Africa have already acknowledged homeschooling in their education legislation. Homeschooling is growing worldwide, and more and more homeschooling groups and organizations are turning to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to fight for the right to this alternative method of education. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1948) explicitly states that the family has the full right to decide on the type of education and education that their children should receive. This is also the right most of the parents who teach their children at home (in countries where it is not yet legal). Most of the BRICS countries still have a

conservative view on education in general and have a closed education system where homeschooling is not yet accepted as an alternative method of teaching. Most countries do not consider this an essential provision of education. In the case of South Africa and Russia, the authorities in the early 1990s adapted their education laws to provide for the choice of homeschooling, under strict conditions. However, Russia's legislation is designed to make it easier for children to be taught at home. Authorities that have not yet provided for homeschooling as an alternative method of education should realize that parents will be unlawfully exercising this universal right to homeschooling. Authorities that do not recognize homeschooling will never be able to fulfill their state duty of quality education if this remains the case. There will always be parents who prefer homeschooling for their children and that number is growing every year in all BRICS countries. Homeschooling is here to stay. The biggest problem facing the BRICS countries is the regulation of homeschooled children and the quality of education these children receive. One recommendation that can be made is, in the case of Russia, to legally recognize this method of education and to put regulatory bodies in place to ensure that quality education is available to all.

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